

Leshy left largely intact the language drafted by Babbitt regarding the Eckstein conversation.

Leshy told investigators that he tried briefly and unsuccessfully to find a copy of the earlier letter to Sen. McCain, and did not review it during the drafting or editing of the letter to Sen.

Thompson. Beller told investigators that she brought the final version of the letter to Babbitt for his review and signature, and he quickly read and signed the letter. The letter was promptly distributed that afternoon.

Within hours, Interior employees received calls from media representatives about the letters. Within days after the letter to Thompson was sent, media stories appeared asserting that Babbitt had lied to Sen. McCain, based on his recent letter to Sen. Thompson. Interior Department witnesses specifically recalled being stunned and dismayed to read an Oct. 12, 1997, article in *The Washington Post* entitled *Babbitt Admits Falsehood in Casino Bid*. The Interior staff involved in drafting the letter to Thompson maintain they saw the statements about the Eckstein conversation as not contradictory and a minor part of a much larger issue: the integrity of the DOI decision-making process, and whether the Hudson decision had been made for the right reasons. They stated that little attention had been paid by them to the only portion of the letter written by Secretary Babbitt – his comments on the Eckstein allegations – which became the focus of media attention.

There were three significant events in the immediate wake of Babbitt's Oct. 10 letter and the resulting press reports. First, White House officials told Babbitt to call Sen. McCain and apologize for misleading him with Babbitt's earlier letter. Second, on Oct. 14, the Justice

⁶³¹(...continued)
including the mark-ups by the Secretary, but Leshy said he did not have them and must have thrown them out.